

SHARED BERINGIAN HERITAGE PROGRAM



National Park Service
Department of the Interior





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INTRODUCTION

The Shared Beringian Heritage Program at the National Park Service is an international program that recognizes and celebrates the natural resources and cultural heritage shared by the United States and Russia on both sides of the Bering Strait. The program seeks local, national, and international participation in the preservation and understanding of natural resources and protected lands, and works to sustain and protect the cultural traditions and subsistence lifestyle of the Native peoples of the Beringia region.

CENTRAL BERINGIA REGION



Following a historic summit in 1990, Presidents George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev proposed the idea of an international protected area that would span the Bering Strait and include federal lands on both sides. As a result of this vision, the Shared Beringian Heritage Program was established by Congress in 1991 to reconnect the people of Alaska and Chukotka and to recognize the international significance of the area known as “Beringia.”

The program’s goals are to:

- Foster a climate of mutual understanding and cooperation among the United States, Russia, and the indigenous people of Beringia in environmental protection, historic preservation, and interpretation.
- Support subsistence opportunities within Beringia and recognize the unique and traditional activities by indigenous people of the region.
- Promote the study, interpretation, and enjoyment of the natural and cultural resources of international significance.
- Support cultural exchange between the indigenous people on both sides of the Bering Strait.

In pursuit of these goals, the Shared Beringian Heritage Program engages with communities in the Beringia region and beyond and encourages participation in the program’s primary activities. Through funding cooperative projects, the program enables people, organizations, institutions, universities, regional governments, students and scientists to create and implement activities linking Alaska and Chukotka. Each year there are between 12-20 active projects ranging from 1-3 years in duration. The program is dedicated to contributing in all areas of research and recent projects have included work on marine mammals, sea ice patterns, reindeer herding, archaeology, family reunifications, traditional ecological knowledge, language preservation, and shared cultural traditions.

This brochure is an exploration of projects that the Beringia Program has supported and demonstrates the multi-disciplinary nature of the program. Project ideas from any field that supports the mission and goals of the Beringia Program are welcome and encouraged.

Please visit our website or contact us for more information on the program and the projects.

www.nps.gov/akso/beringia
Shared Beringian Heritage Program
907-644-3606



YOUTH

The Shared Beringian Heritage Program is committed to involving youth in projects whenever possible. Youth are a fundamental part of the Beringian community. Their knowledge, energy, and fresh perspectives are valuable contributions, as they represent the future of the region. Over the years, youth have been involved in exchanges, cultural heritage studies, climate change projects, and in 2011 they participated in a youth forum at the Beringia Days Conference. The Beringia program and its cooperators will continue to strive to include youth in projects and program activities. The following two projects illustrate the benefits of having a youth component.

FEATURED PROJECTS



Alaska/Chukotka Climate Change Examination

This project began in 2008 and gave students and teachers from West High School in Anchorage the opportunity to participate in an exchange with communities in Far East Russia with the goal of learning about climate change. The group was able to interact and work with Russian students in examining the effects of climate change in Chukotka, Russia. Many of the students were taking Russian in school so the project was a chance to expand on their language skills as well as communicate and establish life-long connections. Students interviewed Native elders, scientists and local leaders to gather data that they then presented at the 2011 Beringia Days Conference. The scientific data that the students collected was contributed to important bird and plant studies. Benefits to the students overall have been numerous; they established relationships across the Strait with their peers, learned to use scientific language to communicate and gained an appreciation of the knowledge and wisdom of indigenous people in their regions. Russian students came out of the exchange stating that they recognize how important “green” policies are to Americans and reflect on the positive effects such policies could have in their own country. All the youth involved have been able to use their experience from this project as a stepping stone to continuing education.



Arctic Teens Speak Out- Finding The Lost Dances



A cross-cultural exchange program between Alaska Native youth of Kotzebue and Russian Native youth of the Chukotka region began in 2005. It began as a workshop for Kotzebue youth on the use of multi-media equipment quickly morphed into an exploration of the “lost dances” of the indigenous people of Chukotka and Alaska. The project became a story

of cultural continuity in a changing society, told through the expression of an ancient traditional Native dance. The students were able to meet with traditional dancers in Novo Chaplino and Provideniya in Russia and share impressions about life in their communities and the impacts of traditional dance styles on both sides of the Bering Strait. Equipped with professional skills as videographers, the youth were able to film the exchanges and produced a full-length documentary film called “The Lost Dances”. The group, who named themselves the Sivulliq Youth Media Group, included seven youth from Kotzebue who have dedicated years of work and energy to producing a record of their travels and discoveries.





ARCHEOLOGY

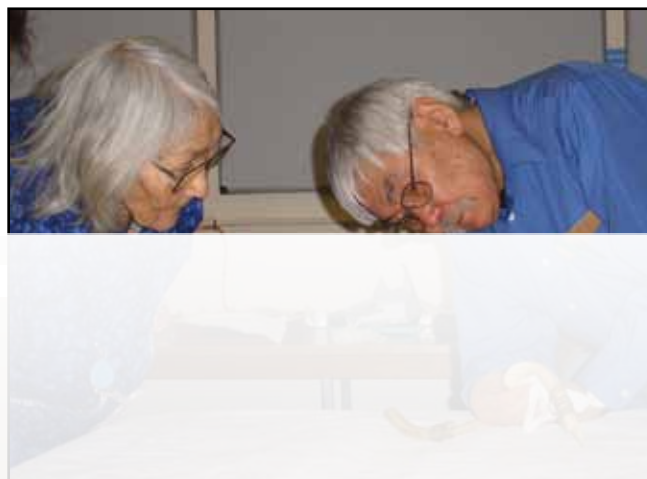
The Beringia Program celebrates the shared natural and cultural resources of the Beringia region on both sides of the Bering Strait. One of the ways this is accomplished is by funding projects that are of local and scientific importance utilizing different methods and coming from different fields. Archeology, as a discipline, fits this description and there have been several very successful Beringia projects involving archeological field work and analysis. The results of these projects, whether they be a published catalog or a large-scale, multi-year excavation, are useful for future students and scientists in the Beringia region. Two of these projects are highlighted below:

FEATURED PROJECTS



Early Humans in the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

Much of the debate around the origins of the first Americans is centered on the significance of the Clovis culture, the earliest documented archaeological culture in North America. The discovery of an archaeological site near Serpentine Hot Springs in the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve provided a field work location for archeologists to determine the origins of the Clovis culture, and how Beringia fit in to the picture. The analysis done by the archeologists led to the discovery that the site contained preserved remains. The analysis of these remains could likely provide the first direct glimpse into the subsistence pursuits of these earliest known inhabitants of the Bering Land Bridge area. This evidence contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the ancient Beringia region and early North American cultures. Excavation and analysis continues at this site.



Living with Old Things

A publication resulting from this project shared the knowledge, stories, and perspectives gained from a museum documentation trip to the British Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Great Britain with five Iñupiaq cultural advisors. The purpose of the visit was to document one of the oldest and largest Iñupiaq artifact collections in the world. In 1826 and 1827, the artifacts were trafficked between Iñupiaq traders and British Naval officers of the HMS Blossom when the ship entered the Bering Strait and anchored in Kotzebue Sound. Upon return to Britain, the officers presented their collection to various British museums. Examining the extensive collections with Iñupiaq heritage advisors generated stories and perspectives that illuminated the contemporary significance of this historic collection. They recalled stories of harvesting and processing skills, of raising children, and of the daily engagements between people, animals, and materials from land and sea. This information was compiled into a catalog and published as "Living with Old Things" by Amber Lincoln, which was then made available to the public.



CULTURAL HERITAGE

One of the primary goals of the Shared Beringian Heritage Program is to unite the people of the Beringia region by emphasizing their shared cultural heritage. This is accomplished by funding projects that promote the study, interpretation, and enjoyment of cultural resources on both sides of the Bering Strait. The program also creates opportunities for cultural exchange between the indigenous peoples of the region. The following two projects are focused on preserving the rich cultural heritage of people who inhabit the Beringia region.

FEATURED PROJECTS



Indigenous Language Learning and Documentation in the Bering Strait Region

As the world becomes more accessible to rural Alaskan communities, the future of indigenous languages in the Bering Strait has become severely threatened. In 2010, the Arctic Studies Center (ASC) received funding to work with elder fluent speakers of the Inupiaq and St. Lawrence Island/ Siberian Yupik languages to produce extensive linguistic recordings and documentation of heritage objects that are in the Smithsonian exhibit *Living Our Cultures, Sharing Our Heritage: The First Peoples of Alaska*. The Arctic Studies Center worked with regional language educators to turn these recordings (video and audio) into language teaching tools and community source books with English and Russian translations. This project has conducted two successful language workshops, the most recent being in early 2012 at the Anchorage museum. The ASC reported that participants were all from St. Lawrence Island and spoke the same dialect. During the workshop, the participants spoke for over 20 hours about 25 cultural heritage objects from the Smithsonian collection. Such workshops have been recorded and video-taped in order to produce teaching materials. These as video language learning segments and Inupiaq and Yupik community source books that include images and text describing the objects discussed.



Reindeer Bridge of Beringia

Reindeer are not native to Alaska. In the late 1800's, the coming of reindeer and reindeer herding to Alaska created a cultural bridge that forever connected four Indigenous Arctic Peoples: the Chukchi, the Inupiaq, the Saami, and the Yup'ik. In 1894 the U.S. government provided funds to hire thirteen Sami herders from Norway and brought them to Alaska to teach herding skills to the Alaska Natives using reindeer breeding stock from Chukotka. This project documents the exchange of knowledge that occurred between several distinct cultures. It produced exhibits of photos and artifacts highlighting the shared history, and elders were consulted in order to reestablish connections between long lost relatives across the region. This research was shared in a catalog called *The Sami Reindeer People of Alaska*, which documented interviews with Sami descendants and elders who told stories of reindeer herding in Alaska. The project also facilitated events that brought Chukchi, Inupiaq and Saami communities together in order to foster the exchange of cultural information and traditional knowledge on reindeer husbandry in the Beringia region.

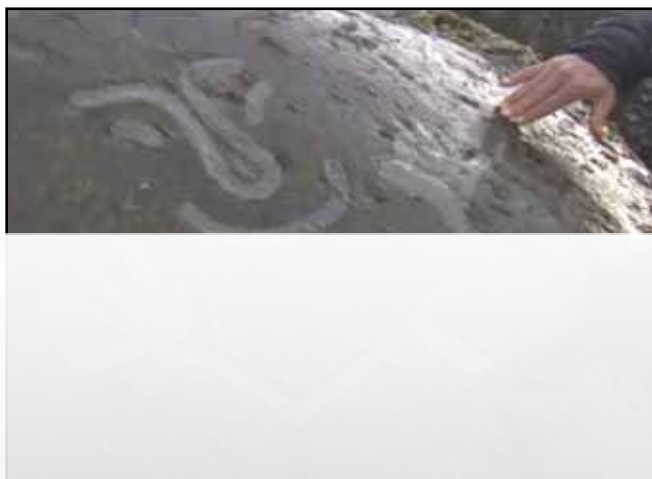




EDUCATION

Education is an important component of the Shared Beringian Heritage Program. Informing the public about the Beringia region is vital to the growth and preservation of the region. Projects with an education component provide the program with materials related to the history, culture, and environment in Beringia and are then shared with the public. Recent projects have focused on issues that face the region, like climate change and subsistence hunting, Native culture, and relations with Russia.

FEATURED PROJECTS



Telling Our Stories



Through 12 educational video podcasts (also known as vodcasts) the Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak was able to connect Sugpiaq leaders, artists and anthropologists to multiple audiences in English and Russian and share aspects of culture and history. In short and informative videos, the project highlighted important aspects of Sugpiaq heritage, including an exploration of the ancient Cape Alitak petroglyphs and a demonstration of traditional basket weaving. In addition, the Alutiiq Museum designed and published an annotated catalog of the Sugpiaq Collections of the Kunstkamera, a project that reunited Alaska's Sugpiaq community with ancestral objects stored in the Peter the Great Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. These vodcasts are now a part of the Shared Beringian Heritage Program website and are featured in our 'What is Beringia: Videos' section.

Nome Community Center Youth Exchange

Through this project with the Nome Community Center, 12 students ranging in age from 14 to 18 visited the villages of Provideniya and New Chaplino for a cultural exchange with their Russian peers and distant relatives. The exchange was conducted with the Beringia Nature Ethnic Park on the Chukotka side, and it fostered interest in, knowledge of, and respect for shared cultural practices. The exchange also improved communication between the youth of both regions and integrated traditional and modern concepts of cultural awareness. This important exchange resulted in the sharing of ideas and traditions that were then presented at a public forum in Nome





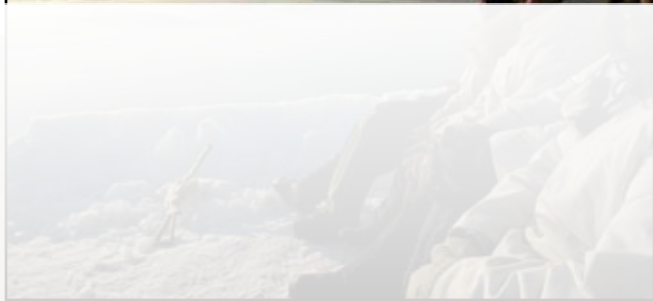
BIOLOGY

The biological projects funded by the Beringia Program explore a wide variety of issues and comparative themes. The projects have focused on sampling and analyzing plants and animals, with the goal of providing a comparison between different areas of Beringia or documenting a bilateral picture of a regional population. These projects are of mutual benefit, and are often conducted on both sides of the Bering Strait. The resulting conclusions from these projects are of significance to a wide variety of people, but the cooperation that is stimulated by the linkages across the Bering Strait are also of value to the entire Beringia region. The two projects featured here demonstrate important scientific conclusions and the cooperation that occurs between people in the context of scientific research:

FEATURED PROJECTS



Photo by Tunilquq Leavitt



Bio-sampling of Gray and Bowhead Whales

The aboriginal people of Chukotka (Russia) depend on gray whales and bowhead whales for nutrition, cultural vitality and spiritual integrity. When the health of these animals is jeopardized, it is a community problem that disrupts food security. Bio-sampling efforts can provide a bilateral picture of the health of these animals, and training in sampling techniques benefits indigenous people in Chukotka. During this project the North Slope Borough in Barrow, Alaska, worked with native hunters in Chukotka to provide training on the examination and collection of tissue samples of bowhead and gray whales during 2003-2005. The North Slope Borough also provided equipment for this sampling that would cause the least amount of trauma to the whale. The examination and sampling of whales harvested in Chukotka provided both sides with an opportunity to establish relevant baselines for health and to help evaluate the nutritional status of the gray and bowhead whale populations.

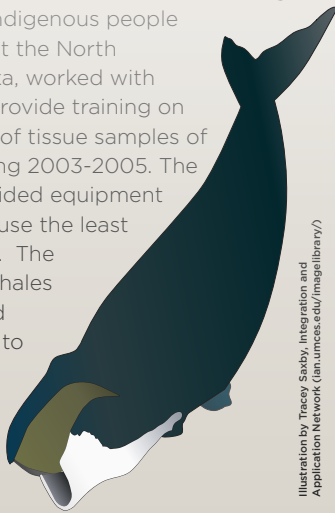


Illustration by Tracey Saxby, Integration and Application Network (ian.umces.edu/imagegallery/)

Health Evaluation of Walrus

Little is known about the health and body condition of Walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*) that populate Russian and Alaskan waters. Climate change and the resulting environmental changes increase the likelihood that there will be effects on marine mammal health. This community-based project, led by Kawerak, monitored walrus health in a changing environment through the collection and analysis of biological samples. The data collected advanced the knowledge of arctic pinniped biology and the training that was conducted benefited both the subsistence hunters in Chukotka and the scientists in Alaska. Several Chukotka subsistence hunters were trained to collect a basic set of biological samples from walrus. The hunters took this new knowledge to the field with them and collected samples to send back for analysis in Alaska, which then provides a comprehensive picture of walrus health in the Beringia region.





TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE (TEK)

By definition, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is a cumulative body of knowledge and practices that evolve as they are passed down through generations of indigenous people. TEK concerns the interaction of humans and their environment, and it is a significant component of several Beringia projects. It is often used in the management of natural resources, to augment or supplement traditional scientific knowledge. The Beringia Program has made the inclusion of TEK a priority when considering projects and recognizes that differing perspectives and traditional knowledge add value and legitimacy to any project. The projects listed below are examples of how TEK can add knowledge and value to any field of study.

FEATURED PROJECTS



Sea Ice Knowledge and Use

Sea ice is a fundamental feature of the polar environment; it is also one of the most tangible indicators of its change. This project's main goal was to expand Beringian residents' participation in local sea ice observation, sharing of ecological knowledge, and the documentation of indigenous ice forecasting and navigational practices. Dr. Igor Krupnik coordinated the project and covered both the Alaskan and Russian portions of Beringia as it was implemented as a collaborative effort with several local partners. The project's acronym, *Siku*, is the most general word for sea ice in all Eskimo languages, from Siberia to Alaska to Greenland. The *SIKU* effort was conducted in cooperation with communities so that the knowledge gained was included in local school curriculums, hunters' training programs, local exhibits, and other venues of community-focused dissemination. An



accessible and thorough volume of *SIKU* research was distributed in the communities where work was done, as well as to museums and other interested programs.



Indigenous Knowledge of Bering Straits Ocean Currents

This project with Kawerak set out to document indigenous knowledge about ocean currents in the Bering Strait region in collaboration with three Alaskan and three Russian communities (Shishmaref, Wales, Diomedes, Lorino, Lavrentiya and Inghoun). The Inupiaq, St. Lawrence Yupik and Siberian Yupik people of the Bering Strait region have developed and maintained detailed, nuanced and important information about the marine environment over the course of millennium. This project documented and recorded, through interviews, the traditional and contemporary use of and knowledge about ocean currents by communities in the Bering Strait region. Uses of currents relate to sea mammal hunting, collection of and access to other marine resources, travel, weather forecasting and other purposes. Local Native field observers assisted in gathering historical and current information from experts in their communities regarding currents. This included digital recordings, photos and video, maps, and written field notes from the extensive interviews conducted. The end result of this project was an in-depth report and an educational poster that was distributed to Beringia region communities.



THE PROPOSAL PROCESS

The Shared Beringian Heritage Program regularly releases a nationwide “CALL FOR PROPOSALS”. Proposals are subsequently selected through a 3-step competitive process. The evaluation process begins with an internal review by subject-matter experts chosen for their technical knowledge. The Beringia Panel then reviews all proposals and considers the information from the technical review. The Beringia Panel consists of five members, one each from the Bering Straits Regional Corporation (Nome), NANA (Kotzebue), and the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (Barrow); and two members from the National Park Service (one representing the Western Arctic Parklands and one representing the Alaska Regional Office). Finally, the panel makes recommendations to the Beringia Program Manager, who is responsible for the final decision on project funding.

Projects funded by the Shared Beringian Heritage Program may be either local, community-based cultural, educational and conservational projects or scientific research projects that fulfill some or all of the goals of the program, as described on the first page of this brochure. Proposals should meaningfully include a Russian component. This component is broadly defined and may consist of research collaboration, cultural exchanges, a Russian partner organization or an information exchange. In addition to an international component, the projects must include substantial involvement from the National Park Service. Substantial involvement from the NPS is necessary to provide expertise, technical assistance, ensure coordination with Russian governmental institutions with which we have relations, to review and approve each stage of the projects, and to engage other Beringia partners.

For more information on the next “Call for Proposals”, and questions about potential projects, please consult our website at www.nps.gov/AKSO/beringia.





For more information on the Shared Beringian Heritage Program:

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